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OP Toucan and Beyond:
Contradictions in Canadian Policy in East Timor

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By the end of October 1999, approximately 650 members of the Canadian Forces (CF) were deployed on 'Operation Toucan' in East Timor. This mission is worthy of note for a number of reasons. A closer look at OP Toucan (and Canadian involvement in East Timor in general) reveals many of the contradictions currently bedeviling Canadian foreign and defence policy. Canada sees itself as a world leader in peacekeeping, yet is increasingly unable to produce the necessary troops and equipment to participate in missions. It strives to inject morality into the international arena, yet often allows trade considerations to take precedence over human rights. In East Timor, and elsewhere, lofty goals of 'human security' have come into conflict with the harsh reality of trade concerns and defence requirements.

Background to Crisis

The events leading up to the 15 September 1999 UN Security Council Resolution authorizing a Chapter VII operation in East Timor are by now well documented. East Timor occupies the eastern half of the island of Timor, the other half of which is West Timor, a province of Indonesia. In 1974 Portugal withdrew from East Timor (its colony), initiating a process of democratization in the fledgling nation. This would prove to be a short-lived experiment. In 1975 Indonesia invaded and annexed East Timor, unleashing almost 25 years of repression and human rights abuses. It is estimated that in the early years of Indonesian occupation over 200,000 East Timorese were killed.[1]

In May 1998, after 30 years of iron-fisted rule, Indonesian President Suharto stepped down in response to widespread protests and civil unrest. His Vice-President, B.J. Habibie, assumed temporary control, and a gradual process of democratization began in the world's fourth most populous country. It was within this environment that ongoing United Nations-Indonesia-Portugal negotiations culminated in an agreement on 5 May 1999; the people of East Timor would be permitted to vote on their future in a UN-sponsored ballot — a 'yes' vote would give them autonomy within Indonesia while a 'no' vote would proclaim their desire for independence.

On 11 June 1999 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) established the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), tasked with overseeing the vote and any subsequent transition period. In support of the process, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided civilian police, electoral advisors, and voter education; in total more than $3 million.[2] Yet in the days leading up to the referendum, violent attacks by pro-Indonesia militias escalated. While calm descended on East Timor during the voting and vote-counting, once the results were announced more violence erupted. In the end, 98.6% of registered voters had turned out for the vote and 78.5% had voted for independence.

Post-Referendum

UNAMET was completely unprepared to deal with the onset of violence, having accepted Indonesia's assurances that its soldiers would protect pro-independence supporters in the event of a 'no' vote. Instead, it is now widely understood that the military aided and abetted the militias. Soon only a skeleton crew remained from the UNAMET mission; everyone else had fled the country.

The question of intervention gripped the international community as the situation on the ground deteriorated. In retrospect, some argued that UNAMET should have been composed of a more robust force from the start; armed peacekeepers should have been sent in as a deterrent to violence prior to the referendum.[3] Calls for an early intervention, even without Indonesia's consent, came from many quarters. Yet, there was a clear unwillingness within the international community — including Canada — to intervene without consent, despite the illegitimacy of Indonesia's 1975 claim to East Timor. That unwillingness was likely informed both by the usual fear of intruding upon state sovereignty and a fear of destabilizing and possibly further fragmenting Indonesia, which was undergoing its own extremely fragile process of democratization and de-militarization.

Soft power came into play at an Asia-Pacific Economic Co-Operation

(APEC) conference in New Zealand, where "Canada's initiative to convene a meeting of 20 [APEC] forum representatives, and British Foreign Minister Robin Cook,...was critical in generating the necessary consensus for a peacekeeping mission. It also helped to convince the Government of Indonesia to accept such a force."[4] Sanctions, both military and economic, were also considered. On 9 September the US suspended military sales, commercial transfers and training programs. On 13 September Canada announced a ban on military equipment sales to Indonesia, but dismissed the idea of economic sanctions on the grounds that they would only destabilize Indonesia and target the poor.[5]

On 12 September President Habibie announced that he would accept the presence of an international peacekeeping force in East Timor. Resolution 1264 was subsequently adopted by the UNSC on 15 September. Acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (which permits the use of force) it authorized "the establishment of a multinational force under a unified command structure...with the following tasks: to restore peace and security in East Timor, to protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks and, within force capabilities, to facilitate humanitarian assistance operations..."[6] This Resolution created INTERFET (International Force for East Timor), to be replaced by a UN peacekeeping operation "as soon as possible."

Intervention

Canada's military commitment to INTERFET was a matter of some contention from the outset. This was partially due to the context within which it was initiated; the public was increasingly hearing stories of troop 'overstretch' , 'rust-out' of equipment, and a lack of communication between the Prime Minister's Officer (PMO) and Department of National Defence (DND). This disconnection seemed confirmed in the lead-up to the mission as, "although Prime Minister Chretien pledged up to 600 soldiers, Defence Minister Eggleton said the Canadian Forces are 'stretched' and might send only 250 ground troops."[7] While they later both asserted they had been talking about the same numbers (600 members of the CF would be sent, of which 250 would be ground troops), the incident raised concerns as to the degree to which DND had been consulted before the Canadian pledge was made. The distance between the ideals of and the requirements for intervention was further demonstrated by the Prime Minister's repeated allusion to peacekeepers as boy-scouts: "We are always there, like Boy Scouts, somewhat...And we are happy and the Canadians love it. They think it is a nice way for Canadians to be present around the world."[8] This completely discounts the un-boy scout-like dangers associated with a Chapter VII operation.

The reasons behind Canada's precipitous intervention into the region were also unclear to many:

> Is it because of a request from the UN? Is it [Minister Axworthy's] role on the Security Council that forces us to act? Is it the acceptance of the new strategic concept of human security that is motivating us to get involved as soon as there is a human rights problem somewhere in the world? Is it our friendship with Australia and the Commonwealth or our economic relations in APEC and with Indonesia? Is it CNN or the CBC that apparently really like referendums?[9]

The answer to this litany of questions is by no means straightforward. It is likely a combination of many factors — economics, politics, guilt, and compassion. Joseph Caron, Assistant Deputy Minister at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), stated that Canada participated in the mission to East Timor despite the negligible number of Timorese in Canada because of Canadian interest in Asia-Pacific regional and economic stability, support of nascent democracies, and human security.[10] A number of other reasons could likely be added to the list, including the 'CNN effect' (an overused but indispensable term) of seeing footage of the capital Dili being destroyed and people desperately fleeing into the UN compound.

Many of the questions surrounding Canada's involvement seem to have been based on a belief that Canada has no real connection to Indonesia and East Timor. This assumption is belied by the evidence of Canada's wide-ranging, yet extremely contradictory involvement in the region. CIDA began operating in East Timor in 1979, with aid in recent years averaging approximately $1.2 million per year. This has made Canada the third largest donor in East Timor after the United States and Australia. This assistance "has been channelled primarily through non-governmental and international organizations ... [It has] focused on developing the capacity of local organizations and institutions to strengthen East Timor's civil society in an attempt to improve socio-economic conditions." CIDA's programming has also proved beneficial to Indonesia as a whole, which received $39 million in aid flows in 1998-99.[11]

Even as it worked to improve conditions in East Timor, Canada retained military ties with Indonesia. This seems ironic, as military repression in East Timor was one of the major factors contributing to the deterioration of conditions there. Few records of military exports are available prior to 1988, nonetheless, Project Ploughshares reported that the 1980s saw $5-million worth of military sales from Canada to Indonesia. While sales were halted following the 1991 Dili Massacre, Indonesia was listed as an important target market for Canadian military sales in the 1995-96 International Trade and Business Plan.[12] Between 1993 and 1997, $407-million worth of military equipment went to Indonesia.[13]

The question of whether any of the Canadian equipment has been used in the repression of East Timor is one that is difficult to answer for certain. In 1997, for example, Canada sold aircraft ground equipment parts, aircraft parts, and navigations system parts,[14] none of which are obviously for offensive purposes. Yet, as the East Timor Action Network has argued, should Canada have been supplying any military equipment to "a country with no external threat — a military dictatorship with one of the most brutal human rights records in the world."[15] Furthermore, given Canada's tendency to become involved in peacekeeping operations in response to human rights abuses, military sales to regimes that perpetrate such abuses seem counter-productive in the long run.

Canada's economic ties with Indonesia have also been strong — Indonesia became Canada's largest and fastest growing export market in Southeast Asia, with more than $1.6 billion in two-way merchandise trade in 1997.[16] Some would argue that these important military and civilian trade linkages, rather than any 'human security' consid-

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erations, have accounted for much of Canadian action in the region in the past. According to Kerry Pither, of the Ottawa-based East Timor Action Network, "Since 1975, the UN has passed ten resolutions condemning Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, and Canada has abstained or voted against every one. Why? Because they've always put Indonesian trade and $6 billion Canadian investments ahead of human rights."[17]

This is, in fact, in line with the priorities set forth in *Canada in the World*, Canada's 1995 foreign policy statement. The first objective listed in the document is the promotion of prosperity and employment, followed by the promotion of global peace and the projection of Canadian values (namely, human rights).[18] What is not made clear is what should be done when these priorities come into conflict, as seems to have been the case here. Does increased trade open up a society, as is often assumed, or can it serve to buttress a corrupt regime? Is the promotion of human rights only to be a goal when it does not impinge upon trade imperatives?

In Canada and around the world, this contradiction between human rights and business interests played itself out in the weeks prior to intervention. The point was essentially resolved once Indonesia agreed to permit the international force to intervene. Intervention could then be seen as a way to stabilize East Timor without directly upsetting or destabilizing Indonesia. Furthermore, with consent, the operation moved away from an open-ended peacemaking intervention (which might have resulted in direct confrontation with the Indonesian military) to something more akin to a traditional peacekeeping mission.

This is what Canada had been aiming for from the start,[19] and so Joint Task Force Timor was constituted. All three services of the Canadian Forces were deployed to East Timor under the command of Capt (N) Roger Girouard.

Air Element

The air force contribution to OP Toucan was two CC-130 Hercules transport aircraft with a combined crew of 103 personnel from 436 Squadron of 8 Wing in Trenton, ON. Termed Canadian Airlift Task Force - Darwin (ALTF Darwin), it was a component of INTERFET Combined Airlift Wing (ICAW), which averaged about 25 flights a day between Darwin, Australia and Dili, Baucau, and several other locations in East Timor. The Canadian flights carried a variety of different equipment, including building material and armoured personnel carriers. They also transported military passengers and supplies.

The two aircraft arrived in Townsville, Australia on 24 and 25 September. By the beginning of October they were averaging 4 missions a day, the highest rate of flight of the non-Australian contributing nations.[20] By the end of the first week in November, the Hercules began flying into Suai, East Timor, despite short runways in poor condition, and so supported the CF infantry group in the building of its permanent camp in Zumalai.

Despite these accomplishments, controversy dogged the mission from the start. Both of the CC-130s are 'E' models, acquired sometime in the 1960s and clearly nearing the end of their service lives. Attempting to depart from Canada at the beginning of the mission, one was forced to return to Trenton three times due to mechanical difficulties. The problem lay with components of the compass, though it was a different "unserviceability" each time. Meanwhile, the second Canadian Hercules made it to Fiji for refuelling when it was forced to deal with a pressurization problem, which would not allow it to fly about 10,000 feet.[21] Further mechanical problems once the CC-130s were in theatre caused some delays in flights and grounded one of the planes for 11 days (though, according to DND officials, this had no affect on the number of missions Canada was able to fly).[22] These much-publicized instances of equipment failure highlighted the constraints faced by the CF in the accomplishment of its missions. They also raised the question of whether Canada's ability to support the international force was being compromised. Without adequate equipment, even 'boy scouts' cannot be completely effective. Nonetheless, by the time they departed Australia, the two Hercules had flown 130 missions and carried more than one thousand tons of cargo and 2,100 passengers.[23]

Maritime Element

On 23 September HMCS *Protecteur* (Canada's West Coast supply ship) departed from Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt for Darwin, Australia. With two Sea King helicopters and a crew of 250, *Protecteur* was tasked with refuelling and supplying other INTERFET ships, providing logistics support to those ships and to the joint task force headquarters of the Canadian mission, and transporting food and fuel to the land force contingent in Suai. As if to further emphasize the problems with CF equipment, one of the Sea Kings (which, like the Hercules, entered service in the 1960s) was forced to make an emergency landing in Dili Harbour in early December.

Land Force Element

Canada's land force contingent was the last to leave Canada and in some ways the most difficult to arrange. One of the first questions to arise was the protection of the health of the troops in theater from Japanese encephalitis (a dangerous mosquito-borne virus prevalent in the rural areas of some tropical countries). Due principally to the long vaccination regime required for complete protection the deployment of ground troops was delayed until the middle of October, despite the fact that they began the regime before the government had even made an official commitment to ground troops (though some have argued that vaccinations should have been started even earlier in anticipation of deployment).

The small size of the Canadian contribution necessitated that a number of operational concerns be dealt with as well. The land forces contingent was composed of only 250 personnel, divided between a light infantry company (175 personnel) from A Company, 3rd battalion, Royal 22nd Regiment out of Valcartier, QC; a National Support Element (NSE) (40 personnel) providing logistical and medical support; and a National Command Element (NCE) (28 personnel), "a joint staff headquarters through which the Canadian Contingent Commander ensures control over all Canadian Forces assigned to INTERFET."[24] Of necessity, the light infantry company was deployed as a sub-unit of the First Battalion Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, which was in turn part of the Australian brigade. Before arriving in East Timor, the company met with the New Zealand outfit in Townsville, Australia to integrate with them and undergo training in cultural awareness, jungle warfare, the rule of engagement, and weapons verification.

Deployed from Canada on 15 October, the troops landed at the beaches off

Suai in the southwest of East Timor on 29 October at 5:00 am. Their activities centered around Suai and Zumalai (about 20 kilometres east of Suai). This area was formerly a militia stronghold and the site of some of the worst violence prior to and after the referendum. However, by the time of the arrival of the CF, most of the militia had withdrawn into the mountains or into West Timor, resulting in little to no direct contact between Canadian troops and militia groups.

The infantry company was tasked with securing the Suai airport, providing armed security, collecting weapons from the local population to aid the disarmament process, escorting convoys and assisting humanitarian aid organizations. It also acted as the quick reaction force for the battalion and patrolled both rural and urban areas. By the end of their tour in East Timor, the security situation had improved to such an extent that the troops began concentrating most of their efforts on humanitarian work — teaching English, re-roofing a school and a hospital, and helping out in whatever way most needed by the local population.[25]

Post Intervention

After completing their assigned 60-day mission, the two CC-130 Hercules left Darwin on 26 November. On 3 February, HMCS *Protecteur* followed. Beginning in the middle of February, a changeover from INTERFET to UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor) began, including a changeover of many of the supporting nations. On 23 February UNTAET will officially begin its mandate: to "take over the military functions of INTERFET, as well as establish a wide-ranging civilian administration to administer the region on behalf of the UN and to prepare for the assumption by the East Timorese themselves of responsibility for their own affairs."[26] Once the transition is complete, the remaining Canadian land forces will depart the region on 12 March.

The recent revelation that CF troops brought as many as 100 Claymore anti-personnel devices (often called landmines) into East Timor to aid in patrolling serves as one final example of the disconnection between foreign and defence policy. Immediately following the revelation of the use of the mines, Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy "ordered a special investigation" and "questioned whether the use of the mines abuses the *spirit* of the [landmines] treaty."[27] (emphasis added) The Claymore devices in question are not prohibited under the 1997 International Convention to Ban Landmines due to the fact that they must be detonated on command; they do not explode when trod upon, and therefore do not kill indiscriminately. Further differentiating them from traditional landmines, Canadian Claymores "are hidden in the ground rather than buried and are normally retrieved following an operation."[28] Thus, it is unlikely that anything will come of Minister Axworthy's 'investigation'. The very fact that he felt that it was necessary to launch one, however, is a clear indication of a lack of communication and understanding between DND and DFAIT, and the problems that can arise when the spirit of their mandates overlap and conflict.

Canadian involvement in Indonesia and East Timor exposed the inconsistencies that exist within Canadian policy. While one department supported development in East Timor, the other provided military equipment to Indonesia. Canada was an extremely vocal proponent of intervention, yet was only barely able to supply 650 personnel and adequate equipment. OP Toucan seems to have been a success, but the problems that plagued it will only become more acute for future missions if the distance between Canadian ideals and actions is not bridged.

Notes

[1] East Timor International Support Center (Darwin), "History - Indonesia Invades," www.easttimor.com/history/indonesia_invades.html.
[2] Ted Langtry, CIDA, *Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs*, Issue 2 - Evidence, 26 October 1999.
[3] See, for example, Walter Dorn, "East Timor: Observations of a UN Electoral Officer," Peacekeeping and International Relations 28, no. 5-6 (September-December 1999): 4.
[4] "Canada's Objectives Met as Security Council Authorizes Multinational Force for East Timor," DFAIT News Release, no. 204, 15 September 1999.
[5] "Troops pledged for East Timor," Canadian News Facts 33, no. 16 (1 September 1999): 5921.
[6] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1264*, 15 September 1999.
[7] Warren Caragata, "Help at Last," *Macleans* 112, no. 39 (27 September 1999): 44
[8] Quoted in Joe Woodward, "Butchers, yes, but they've got money: Canadians debate whether business sanctions should be applied against Indonesia," *Alberta Report* 26, no. 38 (4 October 1999): 11.
[9] Senator Bolduc, *Proceedings*.
[10] Joseph Caron, DFAIT, *Proceedings*.
[11] Ted Langtry, CIDA, *Proceedings*.
[12] ETAN, "Canadian military ties with Indonesia," East Timor Alert Network (ETAN) Fact Sheet, www.etan.ca/infoaction/arms.html
[13] Woodward, "Butchers, yes," 12.
[14] DFAIT, *Export of Military Goods from Canada*, Annual Report 1997 (Export Controls Division, November 1998).
[15] ETAN, "Canadian military ties."
[16] DFAIT, *Country Overview - Indonesia*, "Canada-Indonesia Relations," 1999.
[17] Quoted in Joe Woodard, "Business comes first: while East Timor burns, Canada maintains its unbroken record of ignoring it," *Alberta Report* 26, no. 36 (20 September 1999): 10.
[18] Government of Canada, *Canada in the World*, Government Statement, 1995.
[19] Though Canada would have much preferred (and argued forefully for) a UN mission from the outset. See, for example, Canada on the United Nations Security Council 1999-2000, "Weekly Report," 31 January-4 February.
[20] Capt Roger Girouard, DND Weekly Operations Briefing, 14 October 1999.
[21] Maj Bill Lewis, DND Weekly Operations Briefing, 23 September 1999.
[22] Col Walter Natynczyk, DND Weekly Operations Briefing, 25 November 1999.
[23] "Canada's Airlift Taskforce Completes Deployment in East Timor," DND Press Release, 24 November 1999.
[24] DND, "Operation Toucan Canadian Ground Troops Participation," 5 November 1999, Fact Sheet.
[25] Dennis Passa, "Canada Closes East Timor Headquarters," CNEWS, 14 February 2000.
[26] Paul Meyer, DFAIT, *Proceedings*.
[27] CBC News, "Axworthy asks why Canadian landmines were in East Timor," 15 February 2000.
[28] Dennis Bueckert, "Mines sent with Canadian soldier on peacekeeping duty in East Timor," Globe and Mail, 14 February 2000.

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